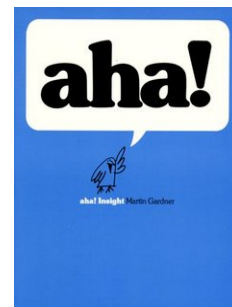
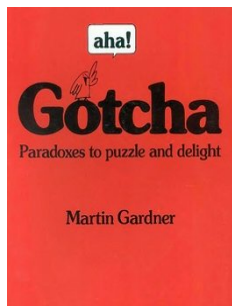
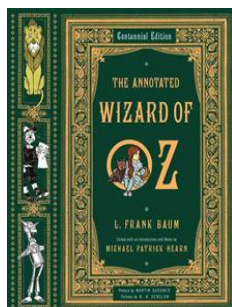
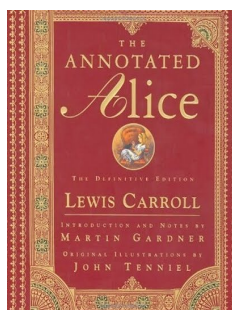
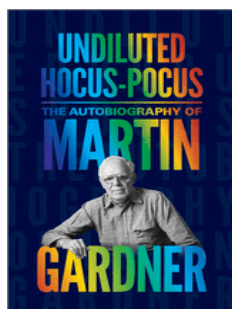


Undiluted Hocus-Pocus. The autobiography of Martin Gardner, 2013, Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0691-1-5991-1 (hbk), xxvii+233 pp. by *Martin Gardner*.



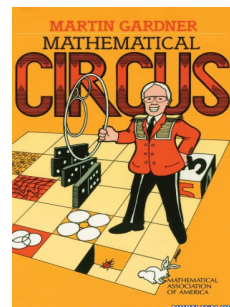
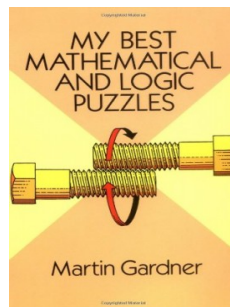
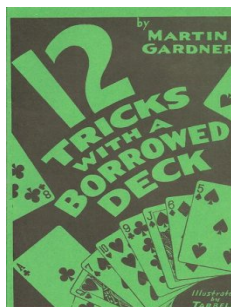
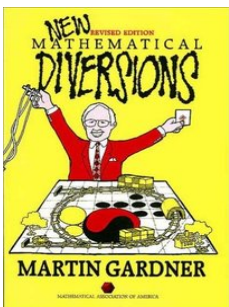
Martin Gardner (1914-2010) hardly needs any introduction in a review intended for mathematicians. His popularity, even among a broader public, has grown to a legendary level. His interests, reflected in his numerous publications, have created a loyal circle of followers among the species of homo ludens that consists of geeky lovers of recreational mathematics, card tricks, and other magic hocus-pocus, addicted by his *Mathematical Games* in *Scientific American* in the period 1956-1981. Some may know about his admiration for Lewis Carroll via his edition of *The Annotated Alice* (1960) and for L. Frank Baum's Wizard of Oz via his book *Visitors From Oz* (1998). These were inspirational for many other of his writings as well. Perhaps a bit less known is that he was also a big fan of G. K. Chesterton (the author of the Father Brown detective stories).

The covers of some of his books are decorating this review, but there are a great many more. As he writes himself: '...I've found time to come close to a hundred if you count booklets under a hundred pages. The count is still higher if it includes books for children, and books for magicians.' His *Mathematical Games* columns are also bundled in books¹.

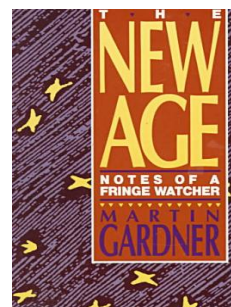
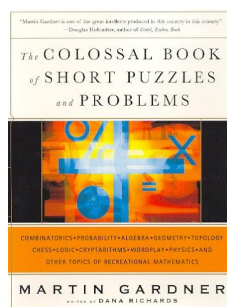
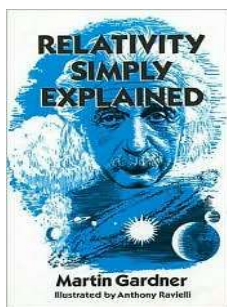
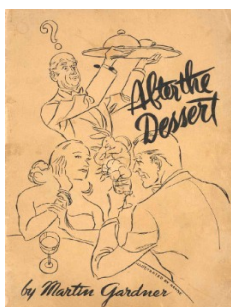
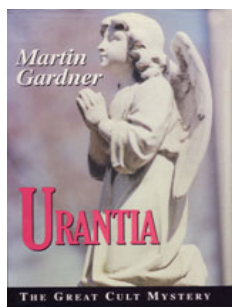
His *Scientific American* columns are already a while ago, so this book might reintroduced Gardner to the younger generation. But even for the older generation, if these columns are about as far as your familiarity with Martin Gardner's work goes, then this autobiography will bring some surprises. It is not revealing unexpected issues about his private life, but it will be an eye-opener knowing that he was active on so many diverse fields outside the ones listed above.

Clearly he has been interested in magic, chess, card games, and all kinds of recreational mathematics since he was a young boy. But the opening chapter e.g. is about colours, and Gardner immediately connects this with colours in the Wizard of Oz and in Chesterton's novels. This is very typical. Whatever the topic or the period in his life is covered in the different chapters, there are always numerous references to and citations from books by others and of course also by himself. His opinion about some poetry and more in general about other art forms is outspoken and clearly put on display.

God and religion mattered a lot to him. After going through several stages in his life, he finally became a believer in God and in an afterlife, although not on a rational basis. This issue is recurrent throughout the



¹There are 15 volumes, made available on cd in 2008 by the *Mathematical Association of America* and revisions being republished by the MAA in collaboration with Cambridge University Press in *The New Martin Gardner Mathematical Library* series.



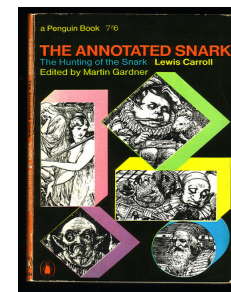
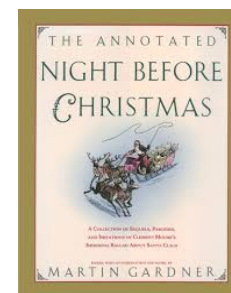
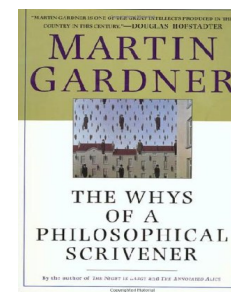
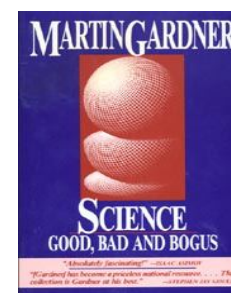
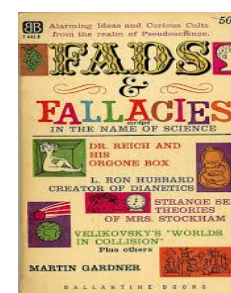
book. He has a chapter on loosing his faith, and is explicit in the penultimate chapter on 'God' and in the last one where he summarizes his philosophy as a kind of testament for posterity.

Another of his pet subjects is his aversion for pseudoscience. There is a separate chapter on his rejection of what he calls 'bad science'. There is no mercy for Dianetics and Scientology, orgonomy, UFOs, homeopathy, chiropractors, phrenology, palmistry etc. or for frauds like Uri Geller. On this topic, his book *Fads and fallacies in the name of science* (1958) originally published with a different title in 1952 has become a classic.

Almost 'between the lines' we learn about his life: his schools, the University of Chicago, his service in the Navy during WW II and later his career as a contributor to *Esquire*, editor of *Humpty Dumpty* and how it really was taking off when he published his first contribution to *Scientific American* on flexagons. Obviously there is also a chapter about his parents, one about his wife and family, and one about good friends. However, these are not digging very deeply into the lives of these people. Even in these chapters, he finds hooks to his views and convictions and to his or somebody else's publications. The chapter on his math and magic friends has a lot of anecdotes, but there is a constant stream throughout the chapters with amazing details and funny stories about an endless number of people he has known or worked with and who often became friends. The list of names and the list of works compiled in the index at the end of the book is 19 pages long. That is a lot of people on only 200 pages. That Salvador Dali was one of his fans will be a surprise for many. You will also learn that Martin Gardner has been the inspiration for others like an ashtray design by Dali. A 'photo essay' has 24 pages of photographs and illustrations including some of the caricatures he made, showing another of his skills as yet undiscussed.

So lovers of mathematical games and recreations should not look for more of this stuff here. Nevertheless, with the many references and citations, they can consider it as an annotated (although incomplete) guide to the work of Gardner. Moreover they will be surprised that there are so many probably unexpected facets to this man. Martin Gardner will live on in the biannual G4G² (Gatherings for Gardner) that started in 1993. His broad mathematical impact may be explained just because he never got a formal degree in mathematics. As he confesses that he sometimes had to work hard to understand the subject himself before he could write about it, implying that if he understood, then also other interested but non-mathematical readers would understand what he wanted to communicate.

Adhemar Bultheel



²<http://gathering4gardner.org/the-gathering-4-gardner/>

